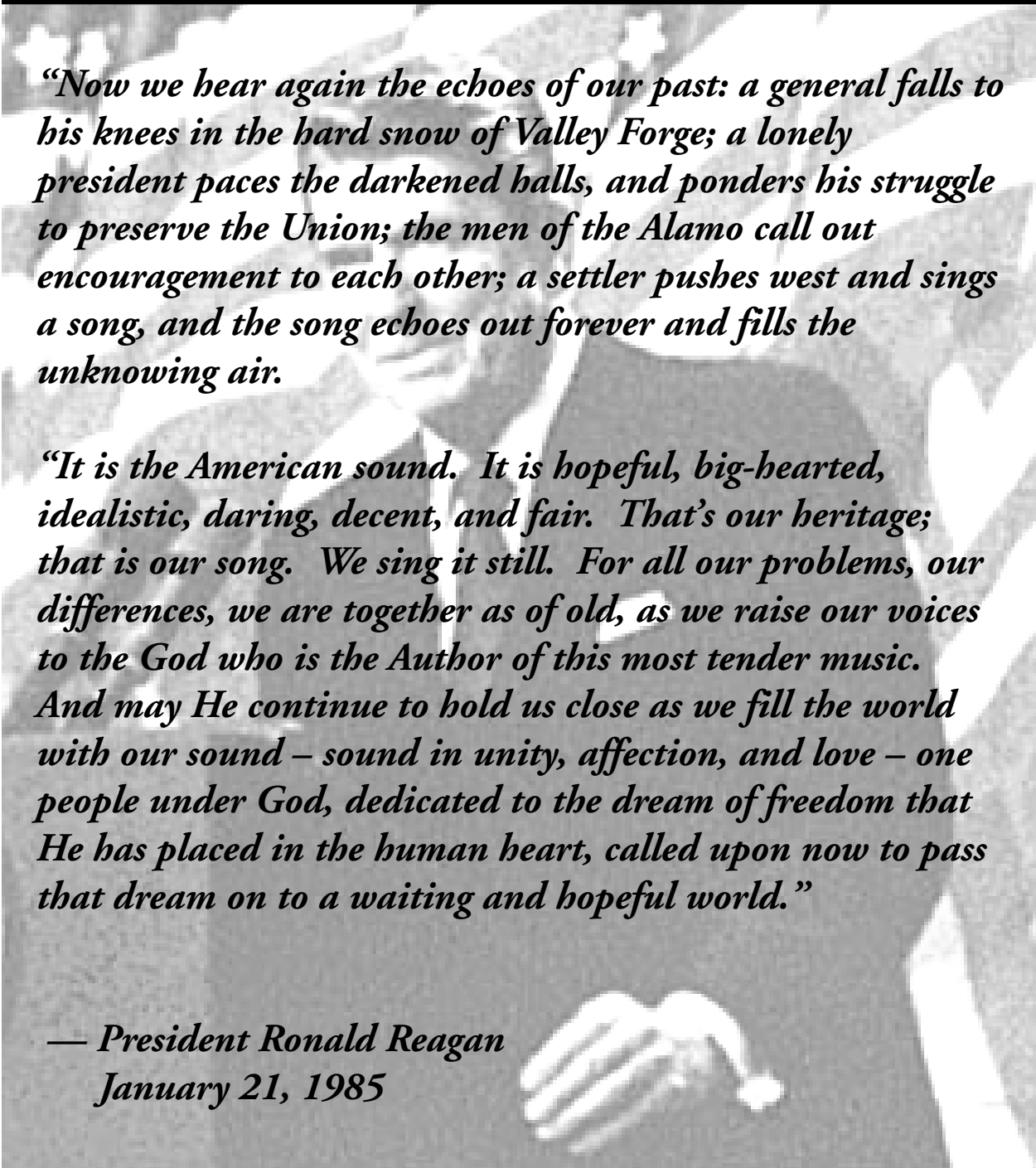


# The American Sound

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## A Journal of Republican Ideas

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*“Now we hear again the echoes of our past: a general falls to his knees in the hard snow of Valley Forge; a lonely president paces the darkened halls, and ponders his struggle to preserve the Union; the men of the Alamo call out encouragement to each other; a settler pushes west and sings a song, and the song echoes out forever and fills the unknowing air.*

*“It is the American sound. It is hopeful, big-hearted, idealistic, daring, decent, and fair. That’s our heritage; that is our song. We sing it still. For all our problems, our differences, we are together as of old, as we raise our voices to the God who is the Author of this most tender music. And may He continue to hold us close as we fill the world with our sound – sound in unity, affection, and love – one people under God, dedicated to the dream of freedom that He has placed in the human heart, called upon now to pass that dream on to a waiting and hopeful world.”*

— President Ronald Reagan  
January 21, 1985

# The American Sound

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## A Journal of Republican Ideas

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The American Sound, Volume II, No. 3, June 1998  
<http://www.house.gov/talent/sound/americansound.html>

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# THE SOUL OF A REPUBLIC

by Reps. John Boehner and James Talent

*Certainly, my brethren, it is a fundamental maxim  
that virtue is the soul of a republic.*

— Bishop James Madison, 1795

**T**he stock market is booming. Virtually every measure of personal economic well-being is up. The economy is near full employment. The federal budget is running a surplus for the first time since Neil Armstrong walked on the moon. Are these the best of times?

Not quite. As Bishop James Madison (the cousin of the fourth president) noted, money is not the soul of the Republic, virtue is. There is a yearning across America for something the roaring economy simply can't provide. There is a stirring in the soul, a call for cultural renewal and an emphasis on the importance of moral standards. Where expectations of behavior have been lowered, the public is ready to raise the bar. Where cultural attitudes about right and wrong have dissolved into shades of gray, the public is ready for clearly defined principles.

This is the sound of cultural revival.

It is seen in the dramatic rise of groups like the Promise Keepers, who call on men to be model husbands. It is felt by those impacted by the hundreds of faith-based charities springing up across the country, bringing hope to the suffering. It is reflected in public opinion polls, where more and more people say the most important challenge for the coming years

is returning to moral standards.

This issue of *The American Sound* examines this yearning. Titled "Commentary on Our Times," it includes several essays examining today's cultural trends and offering guidance for what we need to change.

Rep. Ron Lewis, a pastor before he was elected to Congress, writes on the misguided efforts to remove religion from the public square. He focuses on the wisdom of the Founding Fathers, examining their perspectives and insights into how the United States could thrive for centuries to come. His conclusion is telling: "It could actually be argued that the First Amendment was meant to prevent the precise circumstances we find ourselves in today. Our Founding Fathers believed the free practice of religion, whether in public or private, was the key to America's future. Sadly, their message has been discarded by those activists bent on removing religion from civic life. In the meantime, public morals continue to decline."

In this month in which we celebrate Father's Day, Rep. E. Clay Shaw, Jr. observes that too many children across America have never even met their father, and likely never will. While noting the success

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of the recent welfare reform legislation, Rep. Shaw argues that the next step in welfare reform must be supporting efforts to reunite fathers with their children. He looks to local community activists to rise to the task, arguing that “efforts to promote responsibility among delinquent fathers will be most effective if they are focused on where the battle will eventually be won – in the neighborhoods where young boys grow up to be fathers but not husbands.”

Rep. Gerald Solomon, a former Marine, discusses his love of country and the conditions in which patriotism prospers. He examines the role of elected officials in instilling a sense of patriotism and national spirit. He argues that: “The president of the United States acquires a bully pulpit from which, to a large extent, he can set the moral tone of the nation. Americans seek direction from the White House. They listen for a message. The credibility of the message depends on the messenger’s character. There must be a moral authority from which to lead. ”

Next, one of us examines the role cultural messages have played in the all-too-frequent tragedies in recent years where kids are killing kids and throwing

babies in the trash. Faced with incidents like the one in Jonesboro, Arkansas, it is important to consider whether a culture that devalues life breeds children who devalue life.

Finally, we’ve included a copy of a speech given by William Bennett, the former cabinet member and author of *The Book of Virtues*, at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) earlier this year. Mr. Bennett spoke shortly after the most recent allegations of sexual misconduct, perjury, and obstruction of justice against the president came to light, and his words offer concise analysis of what truly matters and telling commentary on how America has reacted to the allegations. In the end, he concludes that “Bill Clinton’s effect on the economy has been overstated, and his effect on our expectations of ourselves has been understated.”

Examining cultural trends can be a difficult subject. There are, obviously, many different factors which impact the nation. We believe elected leaders should play an important role in raising the bar, using their public platforms to lead the way to virtue. Consider the following pages an attempt to do so.

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# IN GOD WE TRUST

## *Can We Maintain Civic Virtue Without God In The Public Square?*

by Rep. Ron Lewis

The United States of America was founded on the principle of religious freedom. The search for this freedom was what brought many of the original colonists to the new world, and ensuring it became a cornerstone of the democratic government they formed. Yet, during the last three decades, as part of a systematic effort to remove the influence of faith from the public square, that cornerstone has been weakened. The result is that our nation has developed a “separation of church and state” our Founding Fathers never envisioned.

This separation can be seen in many forms. Today, nearly all religious references are left out of the daily curriculum of public schools. Public prayer at high school graduations is rarely permitted. Nearly all public displays must be devoid of religious overtones. Schoolchildren no longer have a Christmas vacation, but rather a “winter vacation.” And even the halls of government are not immune, with the Ten Commandments being barred from display in courts of law. This separation is a direct contrast to the vast majority of our nation’s history, and as it has grown over time, there has been a corresponding coarsening of our culture.

The First Amendment reads, in part, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof ...” This one sentence has been the subject of millions of words of interpretation. Does it, according to many

who want to maintain or strengthen the current separation of church and state, completely forbid the government from promoting or allowing religious activity or expression in government-sanctioned forums? Or does it, in the view of those of us who would like to reintroduce the value of religion to society, mean government and religion can peacefully coexist?

From the Puritans who settled Plymouth, Massachusetts, to the many religions of today, the United States has always been a haven for religious activity. Religion is at the heart of our founding, and it helped establish us as an independent nation. However, at some point during the past two centuries we simply stopped listening to the wisdom of our Founding Fathers, most notably George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. Their writings and speeches contain a vision for the future of America, and none of the three saw the new government they had created surviving without religion.

George Washington is appropriately described as the man most responsible for helping America gain its independence. He is known as the “Father of Our Country,” the man whom we recognize and honor for leading the Revolutionary Army and serving as the first president. What many people may not know is how religion came to dominate his actions in both private and public life. For instance, the first president’s farewell address is often remembered for his warning about foreign influences and alliances.

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What is missed in this analysis is Washington's profound statement on the importance of religion as the foundation of a democracy. He said:

"Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, religion and morality are indispensable supports. ... Let it simply be asked where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation *desert* the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in the courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in the exclusion of religious principle." [emphasis in original]

On another occasion, Washington succinctly declared: "It is impossible to rightly govern the world without God and the Bible." For Washington, tending to matters of the soul was a necessary part of tending to civic life. The religious influence on public affairs was deemed an "indispensable support."

Thomas Jefferson, one of America's most renowned statesmen, also believed religion and the public domain were not separate. While Jefferson is the author of the famous phrase, "a wall of separation between Church and State," (it was part of a letter to the Danbury Connecticut Baptist Association), he did not mean church and state were incompatible. On the contrary, Jefferson believed government could not stand without religion. For instance, in 1807, Jefferson wrote, "Among the most inestimable of our blessings is that ... of liberty to worship our Creator in the way we think most agreeable to His will; a

liberty deemed in other countries incompatible with good government and yet proved by our experiences to be its best support." Government's best support is freedom to worship, at least in the words of one of

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America's greatest statesmen. As president, Jefferson would use federal government funds to build churches for Native Americans and to support Christian missionaries working in their midst.<sup>1</sup>

James Madison, one of the authors of the First Amendment, thought our government should always hold to the values set forth in religion. Who better to interpret the role of the First Amendment than the author himself? Madison believed church and state were inseparable. He wrote, "Religion [is] the basis and Foundation of Government." Certainly, then, Madison did not believe religion should be hidden from public view.

Not only were church and state inseparable for Madison, he believed the very future of our nation depended on religious discipline. According to Madi-

son, "We have staked the whole future of American civilization, not upon the power of government, far from it. We have staked the future of all of our political institutions upon the capacity of mankind for self-government; upon the capacity of each and all of us to govern ourselves, to sustain ourselves according to the Ten Commandments of God." In Madison's judgment, the attributes of religious practice are the mortar that holds civilization together.

Yet the wisdom and intent of the Founding Fathers have been discarded by judges who have wrongly interpreted the First Amendment. The First Amendment is wholly conducive to church and state operating on an equal plane. In fact, the First Amendment keeps government from taking away that right. We are free to exercise our faith as citizens, and the government cannot establish a law that would limit that freedom in any way.

Ironically, when government removes religion from public events, it, in a sense, violates the Establishment Clause. If government, either by law, court decree, or presidential decree, says there will be no prayer during a public event in America, it is establishing a religious point of view — substituting religious practice in the traditional sense with secular humanism. This action flies in the face of what our Founding Fathers tried to embody in the First Amendment.

This is not a debate about whether government should establish or favor a particular religious point

of view. That would be an obvious violation of the First Amendment. Our government may, however, make reference to those traditional religious ideas present at our founding. Hence, the right of judges and teachers to display the Ten Commandments should be protected by our government, not frowned upon and prohibited.

Organized government exists because we choose for it to exist — a collective decision made and sustained in large part because of the moral framework found in religious practice. Consequently, religion sustains more than just a person's faith. It sustains our court system, our society, and our civilization. If our society is not guided by certain moral absolutes

that say to our children this is right and this is wrong, we cannot sustain a free society. There can be no security for the long-term if we do not provide a set of values and morals that are going to last and back up the laws passed by Congress and state legislatures. While religious teaching addresses the profound fact that we are creatures which may live forever, it also pro-

vides us with the moral absolutes necessary to function in a civilized society.

Today's society is reaping the consequences of the removal of the Ten Commandments from classrooms and the removal of religion from the public domain. The decline in morals has contributed to high crime rates, a loss of personal responsibility, an increase in drug use, and a general loss of respect for the institution of religion. An overwhelming number of Ameri-

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cans believe this country is in a moral decline. One way to reverse this trend is to ensure that we create an environment in which religious practice is welcomed and even encouraged.

The religion clause of the First Amendment was never intended to separate religion from the public square. In fact, the goal was to protect religion from the influence of government; it was not, as some might try to suggest, designed to protect government from religious influence. Ours is, after all, a government “of the people,” and it is only appropriate that the religious beliefs of society should impact government policy.

It could actually be argued that the First Amendment was meant to prevent the precise circumstances we find ourselves in today. Our Founding Fathers believed the free practice of religion, whether in pub-

lic or private, was the key to America’s future. Sadly, their message has been discarded by those activists bent on removing religion from civic life. In the meantime, public morals continue to decline.

If America is going to reverse this decline and flourish for another 200 years, Congress must find the courage to return to the vision our Founding Fathers set forth in the late 1700s. It is time to remove the wall that has been erected to separate church and state, properly interpret the First Amendment, and embrace the strength that comes from tending to the soul as part of the business of tending to our streets, our schools, and our communities.

**Footnote**

- 1: “Faith and Freedom: The Christian Roots of American Liberty,” Benjamin Hart, 1988.

**Prior to his election to the House in 1994, Rep. Ron Lewis of Kentucky was a pastor at White Mills Baptist Church.**



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# FATHERHOOD COUNTS

by Rep. E. Clay Shaw, Jr.

**T**he 1996 welfare reform law is working. Thousands of Americans have moved from welfare to work. One of the specific goals of the law – to restructure welfare policies so they encourage work and self sufficiency – has largely been achieved. Hundreds of thousands of mothers have moved from welfare to work. Broken lives have been renewed, and for many, hope and dignity have been restored.

But there is also cause for sorrow. Contrasting the efforts of thousands of moms, too many fathers of children on welfare continue to ignore their responsibilities, both to their children and their children's mother. Children need more than the tireless love of a working mother and the sporadic child support of an unavailable father. They need the psychological, social, and financial benefits of growing up in a stable two-parent family. One of the preeminent challenges for the future will be finding ways to encourage more absent fathers to become involved in the lives of their children.

To be fair, this will be one of the most difficult social tasks of the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Fathers have been ignored, and in many ways even displaced, during the various waves of social reform that have swept the policy landscape during the past several decades. And yet, the foundation of civilized society has always been the married, two-parent family. The fact that half the children in this country – and more than 80 percent of minority children – spend at least some

time in a single-parent family before their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday is a telling indicator of our society's shaky foundation.

Millions of fathers no longer live with their children, and, in fact, play no role whatsoever in their children's lives. This is a national tragedy, and more specifically, it is the primary strand in a web of circumstances often leading to school failure, drug addiction, unemployment, crime, and illegitimacy. As social scientist Charles Murray put it in his memorable 1993 *Wall Street Journal* op-ed, "[I]llegitimacy is the single most important social problem of our time – more important than crime, drugs, poverty, illiteracy, welfare, or homelessness because it drives everything else."

Barbara Dafoe Whitehead chronicled the vast array of social science that outlines the scope of this problem, and the dramatic impact on children, in her 1993 *Atlantic Monthly* essay "Dan Quayle was Right". As she noted:

"According to a growing body of social-scientific evidence, children in families disrupted by divorce and out-of-wedlock birth do worse than children in intact families on several measures of well-being. Children in single-parent families are six times as likely to be poor. They are also likely to stay poor longer.

Twenty-two percent of children in one-parent families will experience poverty during childhood for seven years or more, as compared with only two percent of children in two parent families. A 1988 survey by the National Center for Health Statistics found that children in single-parent families are two to three times as likely as children in two-parent families to have emotional and behavioral problems. They are also more likely to drop out of high school, to get pregnant as teenagers, to abuse drugs, and to be in trouble with the law. Compared with children in intact families, children from disrupted families are at a much higher risk for physical or sexual abuse.”

There are many factors contributing to the decline of the two-parent American family. The wel-

**Fathers have been ignored, and in many ways even displaced, during the various waves of social reform that have swept the policy landscape during the past several decades.**

fare system of the past fostered illegitimacy. And during the past several decades, sexual mores have declined. Accompanied by the disappearance of high-paying, low-skilled jobs, that's a recipe for disaster.

The 1996 welfare reforms changed the rules – work and personal responsibility have replaced dependency. And the economy is booming, with jobs so plentiful that businesses are struggling to find employees. Now it is time for marriage and responsibility to replace illegitimacy.

**Given the repeated failure of large-scale government social interventions, efforts to promote responsibility among delinquent fathers will be most effective if they are focused on where the battle will eventually be won — in the neighborhoods where young boys grow up to be fathers but not husbands.**

Given the repeated failure of large-scale government social interventions, efforts to promote responsibility among delinquent fathers will be most effective if they are focused on where the battle will eventually be won – in the neighborhoods where young boys grow up to be fathers but not husbands. And the battle must be waged, not primarily by government bureaucrats, but by ministers, teachers, employers, and working men who live in these communities. In short, citizens and leaders who have experience working at the community level must rise to take on this formidable task.

Fortunately, there is already a nascent movement of this type. Without much publicity, a surprising number of small, community-based groups that work with fathers has come into existence in the past decade. These small but growing organizations attempt

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to reunite fathers with their children, and where possible, with their children's mother. They help fathers join the labor force or improve their skills so they can secure better jobs. In many cases, the organizations are affiliated with churches or other faith-based organizations.

These groups need and deserve public support, even if it is simply in recognizing the importance of

**Experience shows that it would be unwise for the federal government to establish a new program to provide direct help to these fathers. Rather, we must help nurture community and faith-based programs and allow them to blossom.**

their work and their significant contributions.

The story of a young man named Rodney illustrates the impact these types of community organizations can have. Through his involvement with the Institute for Responsible Fatherhood, Rodney's life has been turned around. When I met Rodney at a housing project in Washington, D.C., he had traveled literally half-way across the country to tell his story. He described how he had been addicted to drugs, went to jail, fathered four children by different women all outside of marriage, and had avoided work and responsibility for most of his life.

But after taking part in a faith-based program designed to turn around troubled young men, Rodney married, started working and supporting his children, gave up drugs, and began attending church with his family. Imagine how much richer Rodney's children

will be for having a decent, loving father in their lives. Or his wife, for having a responsible partner to help raise their children. Not every young man will achieve Rodney's success, but that should not stop us from trying to help the millions of young men who haven't the slightest idea (or the slightest desire to know) what it means to be a good father and husband.

Experience shows that it would be unwise for the federal government to establish a new program to provide direct help to these fathers. Rather, we must help nurture community and faith-based programs and allow them to blossom. Early evaluations of existing programs indicate that it is possible to promote relations between fathers and their children and to convince fathers that they must provide more financial help to their children. On the other hand, the projects have had only modest success in helping fathers increase their marriage rates or incomes. Even so, given the newness of these programs, we can expect improvements as more and better approaches are tested.

More to the point, does anybody have a better idea? We cannot stand by and do nothing. Welfare reform so far has been successful in moving hundreds of thousands of families from welfare to work and independence. But if we stand pat on this success, we will have to accept that millions of single mothers will struggle, probably for many years, to stay off welfare and raise their children alone. Anyone who can achieve that much is a hero. But that's a partial victory at best. Our country will suffer unless we find ways to make two-parent families flourish, especially in low-income communities. If done carefully, government and elected leaders can play a constructive role, especially in the early stages of program development.

Ultimately, focusing on efforts to restore the

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importance of fatherhood will work to the benefit of everyone – fathers, mothers, and especially children. For mothers, the hope is that some can be relieved of carrying the entire burden of raising a family. But, as always, the focus must be on children. A central message of welfare reform is that work is good, and hopefully someday every child in America will learn

by a parent's example the dignity that work brings.

But there is more to life than just work. Encouraging fathers to play a role in the lives of their children will help restore to many children what welfare took away – a real father for them, and a husband for their mother. Those are admittedly ambitious goals, but that makes them all the more worth shooting for.

**Rep. E. Clay Shaw, Jr. of Florida was first elected to the House in 1980. He is the chairman of the Ways and Means Subcommittee on Human Resources and the author of the Fathers Count Initiative.**

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# TO INSPIRE A NATION

by Rep. Gerald Solomon

*I anticipate the day when to command respect in the remotest regions it will be sufficient to say, "I am an American." Our flag shall then wave in glory over the ocean and our commerce feel no restraint but what our government may impose. Happy, thrice happy day. Thank God, to reach this envied state we need only to will. Yes, my countrymen, our destiny depends on our will. But if we would stand high on the record of time, that will must be inflexible.*

— U.S. Senator Gouverneur Morris (New York), 1800

**T**he men and women we elect to office, especially the president, have the opportunity to help set a moral and cultural tone for the rest of the country. Their actions and words can either inspire us to greatness or foster a national cynicism. This is one of the most important roles any elected official will play. Perhaps more significantly than any other figure this century, Ronald Reagan understood this point. His spirit was infectious. He led the United States in a way that made Americans feel good about their country, and he restored hope where malaise had set in.

Ronald Reagan was a man for his times. The half-century proceeding his election had been witness to a dramatic revision of the American tradition of limited government. The New Deal, and later the Great Society, were modeled on a premise that the federal government should solve every problem, eliminate every risk, and correct every inequality. By the 1960s, it had given us the kind of optimism a generation weaned on television would entertain: neat solutions worked out in 30 minutes minus commercials.

But in the 1970s, reality intruded rudely, and government solutions and interventions often proved

to be inefficient and costly. Government couldn't solve every problem, and often it made matters worse. In the meantime, volunteerism, that spirit of helping one's neighbor that made America special, was diluted. And so was patriotism. As American grandeur faded so did the spirit of the people.

This malaise, both acknowledged and to some degree caused by the Carter administration, was also reflected in our foreign affairs. Nothing symbolized the decade before Reagan's election more than two related incidents: the hateful mob that, in 1979, kidnapped the personnel at our Iranian embassy and burned our flag, using it to haul trash; and the crash of U.S. helicopters in the Persian desert in an ill-fated rescue attempt.

It was the lowest moment in American morale since Pearl Harbor.

But then, in an example of the providence that seems to have shaped our history, we were given Ronald Reagan. It was his unsinkable optimism and geniality that made him a man for his time. But there was more to Reagan than just a charming personality. Charm, we have since learned, has to have something behind it. Unlike the present occupant of the

White House, Ronald Reagan lived by principles that could not be shaken by poll results. He reminded us of simple truths, but they were truths seemingly forgotten. He inspired the nation, and indeed, people around the world.

Reagan also re-introduced that most American of virtues, the spirit of volunteerism. Americans rediscovered the stability and satisfaction of solving problems at the local level instead of waiting for the federal government to spend billions of dollars on a new Washington bureaucracy. This was a period of growing patriotism and hope – the American spirit was renewed.

The president of the United States acquires a bully pulpit from which, to a large extent, he can set the moral tone of the nation. Americans seek direction from the White House. They listen for a message.

The credibility of the message depends on the messenger's character. There must be a moral authority from which to lead.

Today, that moral authority seems to be lacking. When an elected leader neglects his promises, his moral authority ebbs. When he regards the military with disdain, his moral authority declines. When he defends his personal interests at the expense of the national interest, he leaves the impression that his agenda is not to lead the nation but to acquire and

keep personal power.

Someone who does these things cannot inspire the country. He cannot issue a challenge — such as that issued by Gouverneur Morris in 1800, or President Kennedy's declaration that man shall walk on the moon before the 1960s ended — without a question about true motives. Such a leader fosters national cynicism and poisons public discourse. Sadly, this is the current state of affairs in America.

Ultimately, Americans want to feel good about themselves and their country. They want assurances that America is still worth loving and the old virtues are still worth practicing. They don't want to feel violated after hearing their president speak. Patriotism needs the proper conditions for it to prosper. It needs sincere leadership from the top.

Some have suggested that the results of the past two presidential elections indicate that, when it comes time to vote, the American people think character doesn't matter. This may or may not be the case — the reasons people vote one way or another are often complex. If true, it is a sad commentary on the state of American culture. But the bottom line is that character does matter. It is the foundation from which leaders lead. Without it, it is impossible to inspire a nation.

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Rep. Gerald Solomon of New York, a former Marine, was first elected to the House in 1978.

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# WHEN LIFE IS CHEAPENED

by Rep. James Talent

*When life is cheapened and the news is hard to distinguish from pulp fiction, mothers and fathers and teachers and ministers need to construct an alternate and better reality in which love matters, and bravery is about showing kindness and doing the right thing. The old copybook maxims need to be revived, rather than mocked in the most stylish ways.*

— *The Arkansas Democrat Gazette*, Editorial, March 26, 1998

Months later, the echo of the gunshots still lingers. Jonesboro, Arkansas — kids killing kids. To most, it was an impossible and unspeakable horror. Tragedies like this simply didn't happen, especially in small rural towns. But to the seasoned observer, Jonesboro does not stand alone. It is the latest installment in a series of profoundly disturbing incidents of frightening behavior.

Before Jonesboro there was the teenager in New Jersey who gave birth to her child in the girl's room during the high school prom. The baby was found

**Obviously, there are unique circumstances surrounding each of these tragedies. But there is a common thread evident in each case: a lack of respect for human life.**

in the garbage and the girl was dancing the night away. In Delaware, college freshmen left their newborn baby in a dumpster. At a high school in Paducah, Kentucky, a student opened fire on a group of students at a morning bible study.

In the post-Jonesboro world, a student in Pennsylvania shot a teacher dead at a school dance. In California, a barely alive newborn baby was found partially buried on a hiking trail. The young boy's umbilical cord was still attached and his body temperature had dropped to 80 degrees.

Obviously, there are unique circumstances surrounding each of these tragedies. But there is also a common thread evident in each case: a lack of respect for human life. Or, as the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* puts it, life has been cheapened. This is moral degradation. And we are now reaching the point where this degradation is frequently reflected in our youth.

For several generations now, American culture has devalued life. This has been the message emanating from much of popular culture. And we are now witnesses to the results.

There is an old adage that the law is a teacher. It should reflect virtue and morality, punishing or discouraging what is wrong, protecting and encouraging what is right.

Abortion is an obvious example of where the courts have perverted the idea of law as a teacher. Abortion teaches children (and adults) that life has no value. At the most basic level, the fight for abortion "rights" has been waged on the premise that noth-

ing is more important than individual desires. The value of the human life in the womb is viewed as a secondary consideration, usurped by the primacy of individual desires. Human life thus becomes disposable — its value not unalienable but dependent on circumstances.

Partial-birth abortion highlights this effect. After all, in the grand scheme of things, what's the real difference between a partial-birth abortion — where the child is almost born before his or her skull is punctured and the brains are removed — and a normal delivery after which the parent or parents decide to toss the baby in a dumpster? The only difference is that one is legal and one is not.

But why? There is little, if any, medical difference for the child. Is it any wonder then that our children (and society as a whole) fail to respect human life in the face of this gross contradiction? That is not to say that the laws on the books (or simply created by the courts) dealing with abortion or partial-birth abortion turn people into killers. It is to say that they have an effect on the culture, devaluing the sanctity of human life.

Assisted suicide is another example. According to the Jack Kevorkian way of thinking, the value of life is not in the human soul, but the “quality of life.” When the quality isn't good anymore, life becomes disposable. Exactly how one defines quality life is, of course, a murky question. One man's quality may just be another's nightmare.

Writing shortly after the tragedy at the New Jersey prom, *Philadelphia Inquirer* columnist Claude Lewis noted that “A half century ago, a Jack Kevorkian would have been seen as the abominable Frankenstein that he is in his determination to ‘assist’ the terminally ill to die with dignity. Unfortunately, in an atmosphere where orchestrated death is seen as ‘nor-

mal,’ Kevorkian has surprising credibility.”

Like the law, popular culture also serves as a teacher, especially for children. For instance, as

**After all, in the grand scheme of things, what's the real difference between a partial-birth abortion — where the child is almost born before his or her skull is punctured and the brains are removed — and a normal delivery after which the parent or parents decide to toss the baby in a dumpster?**

Reginald Dodrill notes in his book *Violence, Values & The Media*:

“*Gone with the Wind* was released in 1939. Its closing line set a new benchmark in movie language. ‘Frankly my dear, I don't give a damn,’ was shocking public language. Of course, many people used that and even much worse language in private conversations, but there is a big difference between what we know people are prone to do and say in private and what is publicly acceptable. There is much that we recognize as existing within human behavior that we have traditionally said is not acceptable behavior. The common swear word was prohibited in public for the very simple reasons that it offended some people and it did not set a good example for our children.”



To say the least, we've come a long way since *Gone with the Wind*. In recent years, Hollywood has become an easy target, and deservedly so. Our movies and entertainment are saturated with violence, crude language, and promiscuous sex. Senseless acts of violence on television and in movies far outnumber the portrayal of hard work, responsibility and accountability. Former Secretary of Education Lamar Alexander recently described a number of video games, marketed toward children, where the purpose of the games was shockingly violent – one company has an entire “kill-a-ton collection.” Does watching 10,000 murders on television by the age of 10 turn a child into a killer? No. Does it desensitize a young mind to the horrors and consequences of violence? Most definitely.

The excerpt from the *Arkansas Democrat Gazette* editorial that appears at the beginning of this essay notes that when faced with a cheapening of the value of human life, it is up to “mothers and fathers and teachers and ministers ... to construct an alternate and better reality in which love matters, and bravery is about showing kindness and doing the right thing.” This is an important task, and one every parent in America should take to heart. But there is also a role for public officials to play. We, after all, are the ones who write the laws. And we, as community leaders, have a heightened platform from which we can offer moral persuasion.

President Ronald Reagan understood the importance of providing moral leadership for the nation. Faced with a hostile media, Reagan still marked the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Roe vs. Wade*

decision by declaring Sunday, January 17, 1988 to be National Sanctity of Human Life Day. In his official proclamation, Reagan asked “all citizens of this blessed land to gather on that day in their homes and places of worship to give thanks for the gift of life

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they enjoy and to reaffirm their commitment to the dignity of every human being and the sanctity of every human life.” Perhaps it is time for another National Sanctity of Human Life day.

Reagan knew he couldn't change the laws that day, but he still felt it was important to lend his voice in support of the value of human life. That is a model today's public officials should consider following.

As long as our culture continues to devalue life, we will continue to see more and more Jonesboro-like tragedies. Indeed, as long as this world exists, these types of tragedies will always be with us. Such is man's capacity for evil. The present challenge is to work to change the culture and restore the value of human life in our society.

Rep. James Talent of Missouri was first elected to the House in 1992.

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# VIRTUE AND LEADERSHIP

by William J. Bennett

*[Editor's Note: Mr. Bennett spoke at the Conservative Political Action Conference (CPAC) in Washington, DC on January 30, 1998. The following is an edited transcript of his remarks.]*

**M**y assigned topic, given to me many weeks ago, is virtue and leadership. I would like to talk to you for a few minutes — without jokes, without ad hominems — about the current mess that Bill Clinton has made and will not clean up. I do not speak to you as a representative of the Republican party. Nor do I speak to you as a representative of any conspiracy — left-wing, right-wing, or any other — but as a citizen of the United States; as a father; and as a husband.

**In conversations I have had with Republicans and Democrats all over this city, most people think the president did this ugly thing and lied about it. If you were caught in this kind of a situation, and you hadn't done it, your reaction would not be the reaction that we saw from the president.**

I want to start with some advice to my friends on the right. Stop yucking it up. Stop laughing about this situation. It isn't funny. This is our country; this is our president. As my eight-year-old son said to his

mother the other day, "Why are they laughing? Shouldn't they be mad?" The answer is, yes, we should be mad.

When the children of America are asked, "Who is your hero?" a sizable percentage answer, "The President of the United States." They answer that way not because they know what any particular president is doing, but because they take that job — and the person who occupies that office — to be the definition of what it means to be a hero.

Quite apart from the talking points that people prepare for television talk show appearances, and the laugh lines of Jay Leno and David Letterman, in private conversations all over this country, in conversations I have had with Republicans and Democrats all over this city, most people think the president did this ugly thing and lied about it. If you were caught in this kind of a situation, and you hadn't done it, your reaction would not be the reaction that we saw from the president. And one thing is for sure: the president can't go on national television and say, "How could people believe such a thing of me? I'm not that kind of a man. I don't do that sort of thing. Ask the young woman." These are locutions this president cannot use.

There is no gag order on the president that keeps him from stepping forward and answering all the questions: Why was Miss Lewinsky making so many

trips to the White House? What about the talking points giving guidance on denial and perjury? Where did she learn that people are rarely prosecuted for perjury in a civil case? Why were there exchanges of gifts? Why was she given special treatment by Vernon Jordan, and given an interview with U.N. Ambassa-

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dor Bill Richardson? Why the job offers in New York? Who are we kidding? There's an old saying: if it doesn't jell, it ain't aspic. This ain't aspic.

The First Lady has said, "We don't know what all the facts are." What does she mean, "We don't know what all the facts are?" As George Will wrote, the man who sits across from her at the breakfast table is the fact; he has all the facts. Has she asked him?

The president not only denied that anything wrong went on, he stood before the American people and waved his finger at us. "I want the American people to listen to me," he said. "I did not have sexual relations with that woman, Miss Lewinsky." In public opinion polls people are asked, "What do you think about a sexual relationship with the young intern?" But there is at least a sexual relationship with the young intern and a series of lies, or there is nothing. If there was an incident, there was also a lie. A serious lie. A lie straight in the face of the American people. I wish some of the reporters would understand they are not court reporters. This is not just about felonies, perjury, or suborning perjury. This is about looking the American people in the eye and saying, "I did not do this." There are legal proceed-

ings to take place. But most important, this is a civic proceeding. If Bill Clinton did not do this, then he can explain it all to us, and it will be over. But if he did do this, then he has lied to us. He has destroyed the basic trust between the American people and its president. The American people must decide whether they believe they have someone as president who is, in the words of the Federalist Papers, "preeminent for ability and virtue" — which is what the Founders said we should have in office.

There are some Americans who say that they don't believe he did it. I think the evidence is pretty strong

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in the other direction, but people have a right to their opinion. That doesn't trouble me so much as the people who say, "I think he did it, I think he lied about it, but so what?"

Here's one thing conservatives need to be clear

about. We have been on a Washington-bashing spree for a few years now, talking about the moral vacuum in Washington. Let us now, clearly and unambiguously, state the unstated fear: the moral decline in Washington is not only in Washington, it is outside the Beltway, too. We have been lowered down, folks — not just inside the Beltway, but everywhere. Those opinion polls are not just from Arlington County and Chevy Chase. They are from all over the country.

There are two problems here. One is people who say, “I see it, I think the affair happened, I think he lied about it, and I don’t care.” That’s a serious problem. That is an erosion. That is moral decline. And that is something about which the Founders worried. There is a problem if people look at what seem to be the facts, what they reasonably surmise are the facts, and say it doesn’t bother them.

The second problem is people who look at it and say, “It doesn’t bother me,” when in fact it does bother them, but they think they shouldn’t say so. They’ve been lectured to by elites, in the media, in television, the movies, in the universities. If they take this sort of thing seriously, they’re considered prigs, old-fashioned, unchic, uncool. And so, for the sake of being a contemporary, people will say, “Well, a twenty-one year old intern, a fifty-year old commander-in-chief, and he’s lying about it. It doesn’t bother me, as long as things are going well for me.” That’s a serious problem.

This is, if it is true, the Dick Morrisization of the country. Let me tell you what I mean by that. The Clinton White House knows what Dick Morris is, they know the kind of man he is. They know how he behaves; they know how he talks; they know what he does. And yet they brought him back in this crisis to help — even though they know he’s disreputable and unsavory. Their attitude is, “What do we care as long

as he can help us, as long as he can get us out of a jam?”

God help us if the relationship of the American people to Bill Clinton becomes like the relationship of Bill Clinton’s White House to Dick Morris: “He’s unsavory, he’s disreputable, he’s dishonorable, but the economy’s going fine. We’re getting more day care.

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We’re getting a toll-free domestic-abuse hotline. We’re getting more pro-choice legislation on abortion so we’ll close our eyes to scandal and just support him.” That is a lesson in corruption.

The problem with lessons in corruption is that children are watching. And if we teach them it’s all right to tolerate the disreputable and the unsavory as long as it’s serving their interest, they will teach us that lesson back, by their own actions and their own behavior.

To illustrate the point, think about a mother talking to her son: “Who is that man you’re hanging around with, Son? What is he doing? Why are you

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spending so much time with him? I don't like the way he acts; I don't like the way he behaves. What were you smoking with him?" In response the son says, "It's okay, Mom. He's a little rough around the edges, but he's going to get me into the University of Pennsylvania. Don't worry about it."

The lesson is: do whatever you want, as long as it serves your purposes. This is called "the ends justify the means," among the oldest and most cynical arguments in civilization. It's very familiar. Close your eyes to wrong-doing, because he's on your side. In *The Republic*, one of the definitions of justice offered is helping your friends and harming your enemies. Socrates asks the tough question: how do you determine who are your friends and who are your enemies? Are true friends simply those who improve your material wealth? Or should they help us strive for human excellence? Socrates concludes that merely serving a person's material ends, and not their moral ends, is a problem. If we close our eyes to those who are serving our interests, but are doing it in ways that lower our standards, lower our ends, lower our behavior, we are making a deal with the devil.

I believe there are lots of people around the president who are, in the language of drug treatment, enablers. I don't think they are talking straight to him. My question is this: is there someone like Nathan around him? You remember Nathan the prophet from the Old Testament. He came to David,

in all his power, and said, "Thou art the man. But there are things, David, that even though you are King and loved of God, you cannot do." Is there anybody who has gone to the president in the last two weeks and said, "Look, you're not just the accused, and you're not just a defendant. You are the President of the United States of America, and you owe the American people the truth. If you destroy that, if you hedge on that, if you violate that basic trust, you hurt a lot more than yourself. You hurt a lot more than the Democratic Party. You hurt this country."

The American child, in the last week or so, has been asking the American parent a lot of questions parents did not think it was yet time for their chil-

dren to ask. Over the years I have said that one of the worst things we can do in this society is to destroy the innocence of the young before their time. We have done it through television, the movies, and the popular culture. We are now doing it through politics. We are now doing it from the messages being sent from the highest office in the land.

In the end, we are the responsible people. If the president has done these things and lied to us, then he must resign. And he must step forward and he must tell us the truth. I believe in time, before too long, whether it is in a court of law or somewhere else, we will know the truth. If Bill Clinton does step forward, he can still salvage some small measure of honor for himself. But if he is found out and forced

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out, he will have nothing but disgrace.

Right now people are looking at the good times, the economy, a lot of positive trends, and they are right to be pleased with what is going on. But I have to tell you my honest assessment: Bill Clinton's effect on the economy has been overstated, and his effect on our expectations of ourselves has been understated. We must face the unpleasant fact that not just inside the Beltway, but maybe across this country, the moral sensibility of this man has led us downhill. He is not a man whom I dislike; he is a man I worked with when I was Secretary of Education. But he is also a man who has sorely disappointed me as a citizen of the United States. He has winked at us, winked at

his own behavior, and invited us to wink back. He has led us downhill — and many Americans, for their own reasons, have decided to follow him. We are now in danger of not just hitting a new low in America, and in Washington, but of validating it.

This country depends upon a lot of things. But it depends on nothing more than the citizens' sense of what this enterprise is about. The men who wrote the Declaration meant it when they pledged to each other, "Our lives, our fortunes, and our sacred honor." They believed they were talking about something real and enduring and worth preserving. So should we. And so should our children.

**William Bennett served as Chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities and Secretary of Education for President Ronald Reagan. He also served as Drug Czar for President George Bush. He is the author of *The Book of Virtues* and the Co-Director of Empower America.**

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# The American Sound

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*The American Sound* is a project of Rep. John Boehner of Ohio and Rep. James Talent of Missouri. Its purpose is to propose, promote, and defend innovative and principled solutions to the long-term challenges facing the country, while relying and focusing on traditional American values: freedom, responsibility, faith, opportunity.

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## John Boehner



John A. Boehner (“Bay-ner”), elected to represent the 8th Congressional District of Ohio for a fourth term in 1996, has made it his mission to reform Congress and to make the federal government smaller, more effective, and more accountable to the people it serves.

John’s first two terms were marked by an aggressive campaign to clean up the House of Representatives and make it more accountable to the American people. In his freshman year, he and fellow members of the reform organization known as the “Gang of Seven” took on the liberal House establishment and successfully closed the House Bank, uncovered “dine-and-dash” practices at the House Restaurant and exposed drug sales and cozy cash-for-stamps deals at the House Post Office.

John was instrumental in the origin, execution, and successful completion of the House Republicans’ *Contract with America* — the bold 100-day agenda for the 104th Congress which nationalized the 1994 elections.

Boehner also serves as Chairman of the House Republican Conference, the fourth highest post in the House Republican leadership.

Born in 1949, John is one of 12 brothers and sisters and a lifelong resident of southwest Ohio. After college, Boehner accepted a job with a struggling sales business in the packaging and plastics industry which he eventually took over and built into a successful enterprise. His gradual foray into politics grew out of that business experience, where he witnessed first-hand big government’s increasing chokehold on American business.

John is married to the former Debbie Gunlack and has two daughters, Lindsay and Tricia. They reside in West Chester, Ohio.

## James Talent

James M. Talent, 41, is a third-term Republican representing the second district of Missouri. He has a history of fighting for legislation that combats bloated federal bureaucracy and returns power and resources back to the people. He has been a strong proponent of the balanced budget, middle-class tax relief, and term limits for Congress.



Talent has also been a leader in developing sound social policy. In 1994, he introduced the Real Welfare Reform Act, which later became the basis for the welfare bill that was signed into law in 1996. He is also the co-author of the American Community Renewal Act, a bill designed to foster moral and economic renewal in our nation’s low-income communities.

Concerned with the readiness and resources of our nation’s military, Talent formed an Ad Hoc Committee to the National Security Committee called the Hollow Forces Update Committee in the 103rd Congress. The Committee served to keep Congress appraised of the dangerous effects of President Clinton’s defense budget cuts.

Talent is currently the Chairman of the House Small Business Committee. Additionally, Talent has served in numerous leadership capacities, including being named Freshman and Sophomore Class Whip for the 103rd and 104th Congresses. Last Congress, Talent was named Deputy Regional Whip by Majority Whip Tom DeLay and was appointed by the Speaker to co-chair the Task Force on Empowerment and Race Relations and serve on the Republican Task Force on Welfare Reform.

Talent and his wife, Brenda, were married in 1984. They have three children: Michael, Kate, and Christine.